The VALIANTS of VIRGINIA

By HALLIE ERMINIE RIVES

ILLUSTRATIONS by LAUREN STOUT

SYNOPSIS.

John Valiant, a rich society favorite, suddenly discovers that the Valiant corporation, which his father founded and which was the principal source of his wealth, has failed. He voluntarily turns over his private fortune to the receiver for the corporation. His entire remaining possessions consist of an old motor car, a white bull dog and Damory court, a neglected estate in Virginia. On the way to Damory court he meets Shirley Dandridge, an auburn-haired beauty, and decides that he is going to like Virginia immensely. Shirley's mother, Mrs. Dandridge, and Major Bristow exchange reminiscences during which it is revealed that the major, Valiant's father, and a man named Sassoon were rivals for the hand of Mrs. Dandridge in her youth. Sassoon and Valiant fought a duel on her account in which the former was killed. Valiant finds Damory court overgrown with weeds and creepers and the buildings in a very much neglected condition. Valiant explores his ancestral home. He is surprised by a fox hunting party which invades his estate. He recognizes Shirley at the head of the party. He gives sanctuary to the cornered fox.

CHAPTER XI.—Continued.

"Wonders will never cease!" said the young man easily, shrugging. "Well, our quarry is here somewhere. From the way the dogs act I should say he's bolted into the house. With your permission I'll take one of them in and see." He stooped and snapped a leash on a dog-collar.

"I'm really very sorry," said Valiant, "but I'm living in it at present."

The edge of a smile lifted the carefully trained mustache over the other's white teeth. It had the perfectly courteous air of saying, "Of course, if you say so. But—"

Valiant turned, with a gesture that included all. "If you care to dismount and rest," he said, "I shall be honored, though I'm afraid I can't offer you such hospitality as I should wish."

The judge raised his broad soft hat. "Thank you, sir," he said, with a soft accent that delightfully disdained the letter "r." "But we mustn't intrude any further. As you know, of course, the place has been uninhabited for any number of years, and we had no idea it was to acquire a tenant. You will overlook our riding through, I hope. I'm afraid the neighborhood has got used to considering this a sort of no-man's land. It's a pleasure to know that the Court is to be reclaimed, sir. Come along, Chilly," he added. "Our fox has a burrow under the house, I reckon—hang the cunning little devil!"

He waved his hat at the porch and turned his horse down the path, side by side with the golden chestnut. After them trooped the others, horses walking wearily, riders talking in low voices, the girls turning often to send swift bird-like glances behind them to where the straight masculine figure still stood with the yellow sunshine on his face. They did not leap the wall this time, but filed decorously through the swinging gate to the Red Road. Then, as they passed from view behind the hedges, John Valiant heard the younger voices break out together like the sound of a bomb thrown into a poultry-yard.

John Valiant stood watching till the last rider was out of sight. There was a warm flush of color in his face.

At length he turned with a ghost of a sigh, opened the hall door wide and stalking a hundred yards away, sat down on the shady grass and began to whistle, with his eyes on the door.

Presently he was rewarded. On a sudden, around the edge of the sill

"With Your Permission I'll Take One of Them in and See."

peered a sharp, suspicious little muzzle. Then, like a flash of tawny light, the fox broke sanctuary and shot for the thicket.

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The brown ivied house in the village was big and square and faced the sleepy street. A one-storied wing contained a small door with a doctor's brass plate on the clapboarding beside it. Doctor Southall was one of Mrs. Merryweather Mason's paying guests—for she would have deemed the word boarder a gratuitous insult, no less to them than to her. Another was the major, who for a decade had occupied the big old-fashioned corner-room on the second floor, companioned by a monstrous gray cat and waited on by an ancient negro named Jereboam, who had been a slave of his father's.

The doctor was a sallow taciturn man with a saturnine face, eyebrows like frosted thistles, a mouth as if made with one quick knife-slash and a head nearly bald, set on a neck that would not have disqualified a yearling ox.

On this particular morning neither the major nor the doctor was in evidence, the former having gone out early, and the latter being at the moment in his office, as the brassy buzz of a telephone from time to time announced. Two of the green wicker rocking-chairs on the porch, however, were in agitant commotion. Mrs. Mason was receiving a caller in the person of Mrs. Napoleon Gifford.

"After all these years!" the visitor was saying in her customary italics. (The broad "a" which lent a dulcet softness to the speech of her hostess was scorned by Mrs. Poly, her own "a's" being as narrow as the needle through which the rich man reaches heaven.) "We came here from Richmond when I was a bride—that's twenty-one years ago—and Damory Court was forsaken then. And think what a condition the house must be in now! Cared for by an agent who comes every other season from New York. Trust a man to do work like that!"

"I'm glad a Valiant is to occupy it," remarked Mrs. Mason in her sweet flute-like voice. "It would be sad to see any one else there. For after all, the Valiants were gentlemen."

Mrs. Gifford sniffed. "Would you have called Devil-John Valiant a gentleman? Why, he earned the name by the dreadful things he did. My grandfather used to say that when his wife lay sick—he hated her, you know—he would gallop his horse with all his hounds full-cry after him under her windows. Then that ghastly story of the slave he pressed to death in the hogshead of tobacco."

"I know," acquiesced Mrs. Mason. "He was a cruel man and wicked, too. Yet of course he was a gentleman. In the South the test of a gentleman has never been what he does, but who he is. But his grandson, Beauty Valiant, who lived at Damory Court thirty years ago, wasn't his type at all. He was only twenty-five when the duel occurred."

"He must have been brilliant," said the visitor, "to have founded that great corporation. It's a pity the son didn't take after him. Have you seen the papers lately? It seems that though he was to blame for the wrecking of the concern they can't do anything to him. Some technicality in the law, I suppose. But if a man is only rich enough they can't convict him of anything. Why he should suddenly make up his mind to come down here I can't see. With that old affair of his father's behind him, I should think he'd prefer Patagonia."

"I take it, then, madam," Doctor Southall's forbidding voice rose from the doorway, "that you are familiar with the circumstances of that old affair, as you term it?"

The lady bridled. Her passages at arms with the doctor did not invariably tend to sweeten her disposition. "I'm sure I only know what people say," she said.

"'People?'" snorted the doctor irascibly. "Just another name for a community that's a perfect sink of meanness and malice. If one believed all he heard here he'd quit speaking to his own grandmother."

"You will admit, I suppose," said Mrs. Gifford with some spirit, "that the name Valiant isn't what it used to be in this neighborhood?"

"I will, madam," responded the doctor. "When Valiant left this place (a mark of good taste, I've always considered it) he left it the worse, if possible, for his departure. Your remark, however, would seem to imply demerit on his part. Was he the only man who ever happened to be at the lucky end of a dueling-ground?"

"Then it isn't true that Valiant was a dead shot and Sassoon intoxicated?"

"Madam," said the doctor, "I have no wish to discuss the details of that unhappy incident with you or anybody else. I was one of those present, but the circumstances you mention have never been descanted upon by me."

"I see by the papers," said Mrs. Gifford, with an air of resignedly changing the subject, "they've been investigating the failure of the Valiant Corporation. The son seems to be getting the sharp end of the stick. Perhaps he's coming down here because they've made it so hot for him in New York. Well, I'm afraid he'll find this county disappointing."

"He will that!" agreed the doctor savagely. "No doubt he imagines he's coming to a kindly countryside of gentle-born people with souls and imaginations; he'll find he's lit in a section that's entirely too ready to hack at his father's name and prepared in advance to call him Northern scum and turn up its nose at his accent—a community so full of dyed-in-the-wool snobbery that it would make Boston look like a poor-white barbecue. I'm sorry for him!"

Just then from the rear of the house came a strident voice:

"Yo', Raph'el! Take yo' han's outer dem cherries! Don' yo' know ef yo' swallahs dem ar pits, yo' gwineter hab 'pendegeetus en lump up en die?"

The sound of a slap and shrill yelp followed, and around the porch dashed an infantile darkey, as nude as a black Puck, with his hands full of cherries, who came to a sudden demoralized stop in the embarrassing foreground.

"Raph!" thundered the doctor. "Didn't I tell you to go back to that kitchen?"

"Yes, suh," responded the imp. "But yo' didn' tell me ter stay dar!"

"If I see you out here again," roared the doctor, I'll tie your ears back—and grease you—and SWALLOW you!" At which grisly threat, the apparition, with a shrill shriek, turned and ran desperately for the corner of the house.

"I hear," said the doctor, resuming, "that the young man who came to fix the place up has hired Uncle Jefferson and his wife to help him. Who's responsible for that interesting information?"

"Rickey Snyder," said Mrs. Mason. "She's got a spy-glass rigged up in a sugar-tree at Miss Mattie Sue's and she saw them pottering around there this morning."

"Little limb!" exclaimed Mrs. Gifford, with emphasis. "She's as cheeky

"There's Major Bristow at the Gate Now."

as a town-hog. I can't imagine what Shirley Dandridge was thinking of when she brought that low-born child out of her sphere."

Something like a growl came from the doctor as he struck open the screen-door. "'Limb!' I'll bet ten dollars she's an angel in a cedar-tree at a church fair compared with some better-born young ones I know of who are only fit to live when they've got the scarlet-fever and who ought to be in the reformatory long ago. And as for Shirley Dandridge, it's my opinion she and her mother and a few others like her have got about the only drops of the milk of human kindness in this whole abandoned community!"

"Dreadful man!" said Mrs. Gifford, sotto voce, as the door banged viciously. "To think of his being born a Southall! Sometimes I can't believe it!"

Mrs. Mason shook her head and smiled. "Ah, but that isn't the real Doctor Southall," she said. "That's only his shell."

"I've heard that he has another side," responded the other with guarded grimness, "but if he has, I wish he'd manage to show it sometimes."

Mrs. Mason took off her glasses and wiped them carefully. "I saw it when my husband died," she said softly. "That was before you came. They were old friends, you know. He was sick almost a year, and the doctor used to carry him out here on the porch every day in his arms, like a child. And then, when the typhus came that summer among the negroes, he quarantined himself with them—the only white man there—and treated and nursed them and buried the dead with his own hands, till it was stamped out. That's the real Doctor Southall."

The rockers vibrated in silence for a moment. Then Mrs. Gifford said: "I never knew before that he had anything to do with that duel. Was he one of Valiant's seconds?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Mason; "and the major was the other. I was a little girl when it happened. I can barely remember it, but it made a big sensation."

"And over a love-affair!" exclaimed Mrs. Gifford in the tone of one to whom romance was daily bread.

"I suppose it was."

For a time the conversation languished. Then Mrs. Gifford asked suddenly: "Who do you suppose she could have been?—the girl behind that old Valiant affair."

Mrs. Mason shook her head. "No one knows for certain—unless, of course, the major or the doctor, and I wouldn't question either of them for worlds. You see, people had stopped gossiping about it before I was out of school. There's Major Bristow at the gate now. And the doctor's just coming out again."

The major wore a suit of white linen, with a broad-brimmed straw hat, and a pink was in his buttonhole, but to the observing, his step might have seemed to lack an accustomed jauntiness. As he came up the path the doctor opened his office. "How do you feel this morning, Major."

"Feel?" rumbled the major; "the way any gentleman ought to feel this time of the morning, sah. Like hell, sah."

The doctor bent his gaze on the hilarious blossom in the other's lapel. "If I were you, Bristow," he said scathingly, "I reckon I'd quit galivanting around to bridge-fights with perfumery on my handkerchief every evening. It's the devil of an example to the young."

The rocking-chairs behind the screening vines became motionless, and the ladies exchanged surreptitious smiles. If the two gentlemen were aware of each other's sterling qualities, their mutual appreciation was in inverse ratio to its expression, and, as the Elucinian mysteries, cloaked before the world. In public the doctor was wont to remark that the major talked like a Caesar, looked like a piano-tuner and was the only man he had ever seen who could strut sitting down. Never were his gibes so barbed as when launched against the major's white-waistcoated and patrician calm, and conversely, never did the major's bland suavity so nearly approach an undignified irritation as when receiving the envenomed darts of that accomplished cynic.

The major settled his black tie. "A little wholesome exercise wouldn't be a bad thing for you, Doctor," he said succinctly. "You're looking a shade pasty today."

"Exercise!" snapped the other viciously, as he pounded down the steps. "Ha, ha! I suppose you exercise—lazying out to the Dandridges once a week for a julep, and the rest of the time wearing out good cane-bottoms and palm-leaf fans and cussing at the heat. You'll go off with apoplexy one of these days."

"I shall if they're scared enough to call you," the major shot after him, nettled. But the doctor did not pause. He went on down the street without turning his head.

The major lifted his hat gallantly to the ladies, whose presence he had just observed.

"Do sit down, Major," said Mrs. Gifford. "There's a question I'm just dying to ask you. We've had such an interesting conversation. You've heard the news, of course, that young Mr. Valiant is coming to Damory Court?"

The major sat down heavily. In the bright light his face seemed suddenly pale and old.

"No?" the lady's tone was arch. "Have all the rest of us really got ahead of you for once? Yes, it's true. There's some one there getting it to rights. Now here's the question. There was a woman, of course, at the bottom of the Valiant duel. I'd never dream of asking you who she was. But which was it she loved, Valiant or Sassoon?"

CHAPTER XII.

The Echo.

When the major entered his room, Jereboam, his ancient body-servant, was dawdling about putting things to rights, his seamed visage under his white wool suggesting a charred stump beneath a crisp powdering of snow. "Jedge Chalmahs done telly-foam ter ax yo' ovah ter Glahden Hall ter suppah ter-night, suh," he said.

"Tell him not tonight, Jerry," said the other wearily. "Some other time."

The old darky ruminated as he plodded down to the doctor's telephone. "Whut de mattah now? He got dat ar way-off-yonnah look ergen." He shook his head forebodingly.

The major had, indeed, a far-away look as he sat there, a heavy lonely figure, that bright morning. It had slipped to his face with the news of the arrival at Damory Court. He told himself that he felt queer.

Suddenly he seemed to hear elfin voices close to his ear:

"Which was it she loved? Valiant or Sassoon?"

It was so distinct that he started, vexed and disturbed. Really, it was absurd. He would be seeing things next! "Southall may be right about that exercise," he muttered; "I'll walk more." He began the projected reform without delay, striding up and down the room. But the little voices presently sounded again, shouting like gnomes inside a hill:

"Which was it? Valiant or Sassoon?"

"I wish to God I knew!" said the major roughly, standing still. It silenced them, but the sound of his own voice, as though it had been a preconcerted signal, drew together a hundred inchoate images of other days. There was the well-ordered garden of Damory Court—it rose up, gloomy with night shadows, across his great clothes-press against the wall—with himself sitting on a rustic-bench smoking and behind him the candle-lighted library window with Beauty Valiant pacing up and down, waiting for daylight. There was a sun-lighted stretch between two hemlocks, with Southall and he measuring the ground—the grass all dewy sparkles and an early robin teetering on a thorn-bush. Eight—nine—ten—he caught himself counting the paces.

He wiped his forehead. Between the hemlocks now were two figures facing each other, one twitching uncertainly, the other palely rigid; and at one side, held screen-wise, a raised umbrella. In some ghostly way he could see right through the latter—see the doctor's hand gripping the handle, his own, outstretched beyond its edge, holding a handkerchief ready to flutter down. A silly subterfuge those umbrellas, but there must be no actual witnesses to the final act of a "gentlemen's meeting"! A silly code the whole of it, now happily outgrown! The scene blurred into a single figure huddling down—huddling down—

"Which did she love?" The major shook his head helplessly. It was, after all, only the echo, become all at once audible on a shallow woman's lips, of a question that had always haunted him. It had first come to him on the heels of that duel, when he had stood, somewhat later that hateful morning, holding a saddled horse before the big pillared porch. It had whispered itself then from every moving leaf. "Sassoon or Valiant?" If she had loved Sassoon, of what use the letter Valiant was so long penning in the library? But—if it were Valiant she loved? The man who, having sworn not to lift his hand against the other, had broken his sacred word to her! Who had stained the unwritten code by facing an opponent maddened with liquor! Yet, what was there a woman might not condone in the one man? Would she read, forgive and send for him?

The major laughed out suddenly, harshly, in the quiet room, and looked down as if he expected to see that letter still lying in his hand. But the laugh could not still a regular pulsing sound that was in his ears—elfin like the voices, but as distinct—the sound of a horse's hoofs going from Damory Court.

He had heard those hoof-beats echo in his brain for thirty years!

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Of every 200 persons who live to be forty years of age, 135 are married.

GUILTY OF ONE SMALL LAPSE

The Following, Taken From Unwritten History, Proves George Washington Was Only Human.

On the afternoon of October 14, 1768, George Washington stepped into the private office of his good Philadelphia friend and dentist, Silicum Stradles. 'Twas an elegant fall afternoon and Chestnut street was alive with colonial damsels out in their new furs.

"Good-day, friend George," quoth the dentist, as he finished polishing a long, wicked-looking spear and picked up a gleaming crowbar.

"What brings you downtown thus early?" pursued Stradles, as he laid down the crowbar and picked up an eight-pound monkey wrench. "Nothing wrong with the teeth, I trust?" And he put down the monkey wrench and picked up a bone-handled iron mallet weighing it carelessly in his hand.

"I beg pardon," said George Washington, rather nervously. "What did you say?"

"I say, is it your teeth that brings you here this beautiful day?" said the dentist, as he put down the mallet and picked up a pair of gas pliers.

"No, my feet," said Mr. Washington, with a forced laugh. "Ha, ha, Silicum my feet brought me here, to be sure. Well, I am glad to have seen you, I'm sure—I must go now."

Outside on the pavement he held his hand to his aching jaw and murmured guiltily: "Ah, well, just one little lie in a lifetime won't do any harm, and mayhap the historians will never get hold of it."

Girls Do the Courting.

Burton Holmes says that the natives believe in certain forms of women's rights in the Philippines, especially when it comes to choosing a husband. For instance, the Bontoc Igorotes leave all the courting to the girls. While the worldly goods of the proposed father-in-law have some bearing upon the ardor of the young lady's wooing, still there are certain requirements which must be lived up to by the young man, namely, he must either have secured the head of an enemy or he must be in the employ of an American; in other words, he must either be a brave man—according to Igorote standards—or he must be in a fair way to attain a good living.

The Follow-Up Method.

"Why do you get the pretty girls jobs first? Is that fair?"

"Best for all concerned," declared the head of the school of stenography. "The pretty girl soon marries her employer, and then there's a permanent job for one of the plainer young ladies."

A Painful Proceeding.

"I tell you, I was ostracized by that snobbish crowd at the hotel."

"Dear me! Did it hurt?"

A critic should have a good memory. At least he should never forget that he has faults of his own.